NEW DIRECTIONS IN
ALBANIAN ARCHAEOLOGY
Studies presented to Muzafer Korkuti

Edited by
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Published by:
International Centre for Albanian Archaeology
Address:
Rruga "Ismail Qemali" 12/1
Tirana
ALBANIA

Printing & binding by:
Mali Pleshti Printing House
Tel.: (04) 272 206
E-mail:mali_pleshti@yahoo.it
Tirana
ALBANIA

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The Durrës amphitheatre: Archaeology and memory

In May of 1877, a young Arthur Evans landed in Durrës, looking to go amphitheatre-hunting. Frustrated (and impoverished) by his inability to obtain an academic position, the Oxford-trained classicist was technically on assignment for the *Manchester Guardian* and charged with reporting the up-to-date news on the Balkan areas of the Ottoman Empire (Brown 1993: 19–29). Archaeologists, however, make odd journalists. For Evans, pursuing “current affairs” seems to have included deciphering a Venetian inscription, examining *șpola* in the city’s fortification walls, and quarrying down the city’s Roman amphitheatre (Evans 1878: 131–142). Evans had in hand a copy of Marinus Barletius’ *History of Shanderbog*, and he seized on the author’s brief mention of an amphitheatre in Durrës, one “made of wonderful art and industry” (Barletius 1596: 488). The future-discoverer of Knossos stalked around the city looking for the amphitheatre’s traces but to no avail, and left without ever having found it.

Some ninety years later, in 1966, the local archaeologist Vangel Toçi would succeed where Evans failed, revealing a well-preserved amphitheatre lying beneath a cluster of Ottoman-period houses (Toçi 1971; 1975). What Toçi uncovered, however, was more than just a monument of Roman spectacle; it was a testament to Evans dilemma. Preserved in the amphitheatre’s stratigraphy and later Christian modifications was a thousand-year long vanishing-act. As revealed by both Toçi’s and more recent excavations (Bilaca 1987; 1988; Hoii 1994; Miri 1986; 1988; 1989; 1991–1992; 2003; Miho 1984), the whole of the amphitheatre’s post-Roman history was a struggle between a monument that every year threatened to vanish beneath water and debris, and the Medieval persons who continually rediscovered it. As Medieval Durrësians gradually transformed the amphitheatre’s arena and galleries from spaces of spectacle to graveyard and eventually Christian worship venue, they were forced to excavate portions of the monument that had been buried over time, revealing, even reversing, that which had been lost.

This article provides a general overview of this history of loss and rediscovery, as revealed by both Toçi and others’ excavations, as well as by the author’s more recent investigations conducted in 2002 and 2003. It is particularly appropiate that this short essay be dedicated to Musafir Korkuti, who not only encouraged our research in Durrës, but who himself has done so much to excavate Albania’s own rich past and to save it from the depredations of the present.

The Roman Monument

In order to properly understand the amphitheatre’s post-Roman history, some description of its basic urban location and physical structure is in order (Bowes and Hoii 2003). The amphitheatre is located in western sector of the modern city, flanked on its west side by the late Roman city walls, and on its north side by a Medieval cross-wall which closed off the southern-most portion of the city. While the location of the Roman city centre is not known with certainty, it is assumed to lie to the northeast. Thus, the amphitheatre would have lain at the western- and perhaps southern-most edge of the town, a liminal location commonly adopted for amphitheatre placement (Golvin 1988: 408–412). However, the presence of Roman baths nearby and the recent discovery of early Roman walls near the harbour suggest an urban fabric extending around the amphitheatre to the north and south, and thus a setting somewhat less than wholly marginal.

Among the hundreds of preserved amphitheatres in the Roman world, Durrës is unusual for its extraordinary degree of preservation, particularly for its large stretches of undisturbed stratigraphy. One reason for this excellent preservation was the amphitheatre’s disappearance from history, and thus from subsequent depredations, after the 16th century. Most Roman amphitheatres in continuously occupied cities were either never lost and were utilized through modern times (the Arles amphitheatre held a small urban ‘village’ until 1825), or were rediscovered and excavated in the 19th or early 20th centuries (such as the amphitheatres of Pola: Stancovich 1822; Mišak 1971, 1972; Međimurje: Milić 1919 and Arles: Formigé 1964: 37–41). Durrës seems to have been covered by a succession of Ottoman-period houses and gradually forgotten. Its walls and stratigraphy were thus protected by earth and ignorance until Toçi revealed them in the 1960’s.

The other reason for the amphitheatre’s excellent preservation was its manner of construction. About a third of the amphitheatre was set not on man-made supports, but natural ones, utilizing a precipitous hillside to support its northern seating, or *cura*. This northern end, and the transitional sections in which hillside was replaced by built structure, were largely resistant to the forces of time and preserve their galleries, stairs, and even the impressions of the robbed out seating (Fig 1). The remaining, free-standing portions of the amphitheatre...
did not weather the centuries as well, and the amphitheatre’s outer façade, as well as its southern third, were either destroyed, or lie beneath modern houses. These topographic exigencies produced a number of unusual structural features, not least a thoroughly asymmetric plan and somewhat confusing circulation system (Fig. 2). Only one gallery, a tiny service corridor beneath the podium (G 3a) ran all the way around the monument: the rest of the galleries were interrupted by the hillside itself on the northern side, or shifted their path through stairs or doglegs, such as Gallery 2 (G2) which shifts inward towards the arena. Typically, amphitheatres constructed on flat terrain required the visitor to pass into the monument and from there up a series of stairs to the vomitoria, or entrances onto the seating. At Durrës, the entrance points were determined by shifting ground levels; at least on the northern side a visitor would descend from a high street level down into the monument, and from there use the galleries and stairs to access the seating.

While these stairs and galleries provide a confusing picture of access and egress from the monument, they do contain some important clues as to the function of certain areas, and the location of the main viewing boxes, or pulvinares, the seat of the games-giver and locus of Roman imperium at the games. Typically, an amphitheatre’s main viewing boxes were located along the monument’s minor axis (on pulvinares, Golvin 1988: 357–362). While no physical remains of a pulvinar can be detected at Durrës, the circulation patterns and staircases along the amphitheatre’s minor axis on the western side make it almost certain that such a box existed here. Two closely-set vomitoria flanking the amphitheatre’s western axis (V 5 and 7) are atypical of pulvinar access (comparative examples include the amphitheatres at Pola, Salona, Italica among many. See Golvin 1988: 357–358). Centred directly above and between these two vomitoria is a third vomitorium (V6); it is likely that the many irregularities in Galleries 1 and 2 in this area derive from a need to provide access to this vomitorium and thus to the pulvinar. Finally, small holes and hooks for marble revetment on two of the three vomitoria point to the decorative elaboration characteristic of pulvinar entrances.

The amphitheatre’s overall size and date is a matter of some uncertainty. The exterior wall is preserved only in one short section on the west, and one possible chunk to the northeast (Fig. 2). An approximate trace of this outer wall, using these sections as a guide, suggests outer dimensions of approximately 118.6 by 98.4 m, and an arena of 60.6 by 40.3 m. The amphitheatre would have thus held between 16,000 and 23,000 spectators (Bowes and Hoti 2003) (The range depends on the formula used. Golvin: sc x 2.5 [Golvin 1988: 380–381]. Bomgardner: sc/0.28 [0.28 = average seat area of Roman amphitheatres] [Bomgardner 2000: 234, n. 40]. In both cases, sc= surface area of the arena, of which 90% is assumed to be used for seating. Lower numbers [12,500 – 17,900 spectators] result if it is assumed that the amphitheatre did not include a summa cavea. See Bowes and Hoti 2003, for further factors). Durrës was thus a middle- to large-sized.
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amphitheatre, dwarfed by the massive projects of the Flavian period, such as the Colosseum in Rome, but towering over its smaller, more provincial cousins. Given its relatively advanced substructure construction, it likely dates after these great Flavian forerunners, but when exactly? The majority of the construction-period levels are currently sunk beneath high groundwater levels, and previous excavations revealed no datable material in accessible areas. Previous literature dated the monument to the Hadrianic period, based solely on the epigraphic evidence for the emperor’s activities in Durrës (Toçi 1971: 40; Miraj 1986: 166–7). On Hadrianic epigraphy in Durrës, Sestieri 1942: 142). However, while Hadrian’s epigraphic presence in Durrës is certainly stronger than any other emperor, the epigraphic corpus itself is so meagre that this imbalance may not be terribly significant. Historically, Durrës was probably most impacted by Trajan, who restored and repaired the city’s lifeblood, the Via Egnatia (O’Sullivan 1972: 147), and undertook building programs in other Adriatic cities, such as Egnazia and Ancona (on Trajanic activities in Ancona, Moretti 1945: 27, 46–57. For Egnazia, Donvito 1988: 135–146. The one epigraphic description of gladiatorial games in Durrës is dated to the Trajanic period. See CIL 3.607 and Robert 1940: 75). A general, 2nd-century date is also suggested by the material evidence. Durrës is one of only four amphitheatres to have been constructed almost wholly of an opus mixtum (the others are Tibur and Tusculum, whose opus was composed of opus reticulatum and brick walls, with opus lateritium and bricks [Golvin 1988: 198, 209, 217]). At Durrës the masonry was composed of thick [0.6 m] bands of opus incertum, alternating with four to five courses of brick [about 0.3 m thick], and was used in the radial walls, the gallery walls and the piers. The northern entrance was constructed with brick only. While the use of opus mixtum seems to have declined generally with advent of all-brick facing in the later 1st century A.D., the amphitheatres built wholly in this technique seem to date to the 2nd or even 3rd century A.D. (Adam 1994: 139–144; Golvin 1988: 111, 160, 163, 196). The technique also appears in High Empire additions and repairs to amphitheatres. Thus, rather than pin the structure on one particular imperial patron, a cautious estimate would place the amphitheatre in the mid- to later 2nd century.

The Late Roman Graveyard

Gladiatorial games or munera took a sharp downturn in the late Roman period (Ville 1960; Markus 1979; Lim 1997). The shifting character of urban energetism, combined with the burdensome expense of both gladiatorial schools and the importation of wild animals, seem to have adversely impacted the games as early as the later 3rd century. As the games of the amphitheatre either declined in frequency, amphitheatres themselves ceased to be spaces of spectacle and as early as the 4th century were either abandoned or converted to different uses (Dyggve 1933: 110–110; Formigé 1964: 47–41; Godoy Fernández 1999; Bongardner 2000: 222).

At the Durrës amphitheatre, however, these changes began relatively late. Durrës enjoyed a more prosperous 5th and 6th century than most western cities, and its amphitheatre may have benefited from the city’s fortune. The emperor Anastasius (491–518), a native of Durrës, may have endowed his birth-city with great public-works projects, a 2.8 km-long circuit of all-brick defensive walls and possibly a jewel-like circular forum (Gutteridge 2003: 21–31; Gutteridge, Hoti and Hurst 2001: 390–410; Hoti 1996: 175–178; Andrea 1992: 77–78). Circumstantial evidence suggests that the amphitheatre itself was also maintained: the late antique walls adjacent to the building on its west side run very near, but do not abut the amphitheatre. Thus, a narrow lane was left between the two structures, perhaps to permit continued access to the building’s western side. Near the amphitheatre’s main southern entrance is an oddly-built postern gate, inserted at an angle to the main fortification wall; the street it accommodated would have run at an oblique angle directly to the amphitheatre’s entrance.

These relatively late signs of vitality may have kept the amphitheatre active in some function until the final decades of the 6th or even early 7th century. Recent excavations in one of the amphitheatre’s later Christian chapels (Chapel 2) has produced definitive abandonment and robbing layers dating to the first years of the 7th century, set over virtually clean floors (Bowes and Hoti 2003: 388; see Bowes and Hoti 2003: 388. Ceramics from robbing levels included amphorae [Keay 61A; late Gazan; LRA 1], fine wares [LRC 10A 2, ARS 61B] and some cooking pots related to Kaisarian 7th-century types. Thanks to Paul Reynolds for his work on the ceramics). In this area the stones seem to have been ripped up and removed, and it seems reasonable to suppose that the rest of the amphitheatre was undergoing similar spoliation. However, given the great size of the monument, we should not expect all of its parts to have experienced the same history at the same time. Thus, it is always possible that abandonment and spoliation in other areas occurred somewhat earlier or later.

In addition to its use as a quarry for stone, the 7th century amphitheatre also appears to have been used as a necropolis. The early excavations of Toçi and Lidia Miraj revealed hundreds of graves filling the arena and dotting most of the excavated galleries (Toçi 1971: 39–40; Miraj 1988; 2003: 252–255). Toçi excavated some 85 graves in the arena and in the amphitheatre’s lower gallery (Gallery 3), where his excavations focused on the area around the amphitheatre’s largest chapel (Chapel 1). Toçi divided these graves into three phases defined by their morphology, tile lined graves; inhumations in plain earth capped by tiles laid “a cappuccino,” and channel graves. Traits common to all three groups were E-W orientation, the typical presence of a single skeleton per grave and rare appearance of grave goods. Miraj’s excavation also revealed a number of graves, mostly from within the amphitheatre’s galleries. Miraj dated all the graves from her excavations to the 7th century, based on the occasional presence of Komani-style jewellery. However, the dating of the corpus of this type of jewellery has recently been called into question, and the many layers of graves in both arena and galleries point to a much wider chronological range (Nallbani 2002). Only a tiny infant’s grave, found in the new excavations in Chapel 2 and dating sometime after the 7th century, provides a more unambiguous date. Similarly, a Christian gravestone, found reused as part of Chapel 1’s altar, was dated on epigraphic
The Byzantine Chapel

The first definite Christian intervention in the amphitheatre took the form of two, and perhaps three extant Christian chapels. These chapels are all located in the structurally transitional areas of the building, where the hillside drops off and the system of piers and vaults begins (see Fig. 2). Chapel 1 was inserted on the amphitheatre’s west side directly on its east-west axis, while Chapel 2 was placed on the structure’s northeast side. A third possible chapel identified through fragmentary paint remains and an added apse, was located to the north of Chapel 2. (This space had been identified as a Roman statue niche by its previous excavators but the traces of fresco and use of broken brick in its construction suggests a post-Roman project.) These areas were well-preserved due to the presence of both the hillside bedrock and artificial supports. This fact may have inspired the decision to convert them to Christian use, which in turn led to the preferential maintenance of these areas over time. However, given the significant Christian presence in the amphitheatre which, as will be shown shortly, persisted for at least eight hundred years, the possibility of further chapels in the unexplored, poorly preserved southern area cannot be ruled out.

While the amphitheatre’s structure was one factor determining the placement of the chapels, another, more insidious force shaped Christian experience there, namely water and water-born debris. The amphitheatre’s location at the base of a hill meant that it had always been susceptible to inundation by rainwater. The original Roman structure almost certainly included a drainage system to lead excess water away from the arena floor but with the abandonment of the amphitheatre as a space of spectacle in the 7th century, these drains would naturally have filled with debris and the site would have become, as it remains today, subject to periodic flooding. Those flooding waters would carry with them considerable quantities of dirt and other debris which, judging by both ancient and modern strata, accumulated rapidly over time. Debris itself thus became a structural entity, producing shifting floor levels and acting as support for walls and other structures. As debris eventually filled parts of the amphitheatre and diminished the light that entered the galleries, whole sections of the building were “lost,” even areas which had been previously converted for Christian use, and were later “rediscovered” by subsequent Medieval excavators. The location of Christian interventions was thus at least partially conditioned by continued accessibility, “rediscovery” through excavation, and positioning above the shifting flood-water levels.

The largest of the amphitheatre’s chapels, Chapel 1, was built into the western side of Gallery 3, directly beneath the western pulvinar (Figs. 3 and 4). In its current form, the chapel consists of a single nave with an eastern apse, lit by a bifora window, and is entered through two side-arches that formed part of the gallery supports. Its side-walls utilized the walls of the adjacent alcoves, and extended them upwards to form the “nave.” The base of a masonry altar lies on the chord of the apse, while the chapel floor was laid with a variety of materials, large tiles (bipedale) in the east and stones slabs in the west. In the western alcove, which forms the western chapel terminus, the floor is missing and all three walls and the ceiling were decorated with wall-paintings; the southern and central walls of the alcove additionally received mosaic decoration.

Various features associated with the chapel are preserved in its immediate surrounds. In the adjacent alcove to the south lies a large, masonry tomb, excavated by Toçi. Further south, the next alcove was closed by a masonry wall pierced by a single small opening and containing a carved marble cross. The resultant enclosed space was filled with jumbled human skeletal material, leading to its identification as an ossuary (discussed at length below). To the north of the chapel, a small circular font with shallow basin is presumed to have served baptismal purposes.

Analysis of the various structural phases suggests that prior to its conversion for Christian use this chapel was a low-ceiled, barrel-vaulted space with eastern and western alcoves, whose primary purpose was to support the pulvinar above. Its floor lay some 45-50 cm below its present level, and excavations have revealed no evidence for any stairs leading directly to the arena floor. Thus, unlike sub-pulvinar spaces in some other amphitheatres, it is unlikely that the space served as a pagan shrine (Golvin 1988: 337–340). The space was therefore chosen for either its perfect east-west orientation, or for the associations of power and authority that had accrued to the pulvinar above.

The conversion of the space for Christian use involved only the most basic, indeed somewhat crude, transformations of the pre-existing space. The vaults of the eastern alcove, its eastern wall, and the viewing box above were removed. The space’s side walls were extended through this now-open space to form the “nave” walls and an apse with a bifora window was tacked onto the eastern end, projecting into the arena. The somitorium giving onto the viewing box, however, was left intact, creating a kind of western second-story gallery overlooking the chapel below. The resultant space was covered with a timber roof and a single window pierced the nave wall on the south side. The masonry used in these additions was composed of stone rubble and tile fragments and with a single exception of a re-used limestone seat, contained no spolia from the surrounding amphitheatre.

The extant mural decoration is largely, although not completely confined to the chapel’s western alcove, a low-ceiled space which lay beneath the somitorium above. Wall paintings, faded and now only loosely attached to the masonry, still remain on the ceiling and northern walls, traces also peek beneath the mosaics.
on the southern and western walls, and thus it is likely that the entire alcove was once covered with painted plaster. Mosaic panels cover the western and southern walls; the rear panel is marred by large lacunae in its centre, but seems to depict a female figure, flanked by two angels, a female donor figure on the right, and two further female figures labeled Eirene and Sophia, or Peace and Wisdom. The southern wall contains two panels, one depicting the protomartyr Stephen, his hands raised in prayer, while the second shows the Virgin, crowned and carrying a scepter and orb, flanked by two angels and male and female donor figures. The later mosaic bears the inscription "ՀՇՈՒՇԿԱՑՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ ԴԵՐԵՐԻ ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻ ԿԱՐԱՄԱՐՈՒՄ" or "Lord preserve your servant Alexander."

This construction of this chapel is typically dated to the 6th or 7th centuries, a claim based principally on the presumed dating of the mosaics, which are assumed to be contemporary with the chapel's construction (Toçi himself favoured a 10th-century date, based on his analysis of the mosaics and a chapel tomb containing a coin of John Tzimiskes (969-976). Other adherents to the 10th-century dating included Nallbani 1974 and Ducellier 1975: 40–45. Most scholars have preferred a late 6th through 8th-century date: Thierry 1968; Castriolo 1975; Nikolaevic 1980; Reynis-Jandot 1980; Cormack 1985: 84–85; Andaloro 1986; Zeqo 1989; Dhamo 1993: 499–504; Buschhausen 2001. Gea 1993, dated the chapel's origins to the 4th century and its architectural elaboration to the 10th century. The seemingly close iconographic and stylistic affinities with late antique wall mosaics, and the discovery of an allegedly Herodian brick stamp in the now-missing western alcove floor, have been the principal props in this argument (on the brick stamp, see Hoti 1996: 178–180).

The author's recent analyses of the chapel's frescos, mosaics and structure, to be published in detail elsewhere, favour a 10th- or early 11th-century date for the whole project (Bowes and Mitchell forthcoming). Analysis of the western alcove's highly fragmentary wall-paintings revealed a Pantocrator surrounded by the symbols of the evangelists on the ceiling, and a standing military saint on the northern alcove wall. Details of their style and iconography suggest that these frescos are middle Byzantine in date, and demonstrate strong parallels with 11th-century images in nearby Corfu (Vokotopoulou 1971: 151–160). The mosaics, whose seemingly late antique style has been used to date the whole chapel, were laid over these wall-paintings. The mosaics thus must date later than the paintings, and close examination has revealed that the paintings, the mosaics, too, bear strong stylistic and iconographic similarities to post-Iconoclasm works. Archaeological material from within the chapel points to a similar 10th- to 11th-century date. Toçi found a 10th-century coin in a tomb within the chapel itself (Toçi 1971: 40). The chapel structure includes only one piece of spolia from the amphitheatre itself, an improbable situation if the chapel were built during the spoliation period of the 7th century, but more likely was constructed much later after such material was already gone. Finally, probable 9th- to 11th-century ceramics were found built into the masonry of the chapel's side walls and apse (Bowes and Hoti 2003: 391). A *terminus ante quem* for the chapel's construction is provided by a coin hoard, found near the chapel's altar and probably deposited at
the time the chapel was abandoned (Hoti 1994: 250–268). Previously dated to the reign of Alexios I Komnenos, a new study has identified the coins as imitations of Komnenian tetartera, probably dating to some time after 1204 (the hoard was re-examined by Pagona Papadopoulou in 2003: Papadopoulou: forthcoming).

The function of this chapel remains somewhat unclear. Attempts have been made to link it with the cult of the only known Durrës saint, Saint Astësë, largely owing to parallels between that saint's passio and that of Saint Asterius of Salon, who seems to have been commemorated in a chapel in Salon's amphitheatre (Bryer 1994: 41–45; Buschhausen 2001: 9–12). Interestingly, Asterius of Ostia is also described as having an amphitheatre death: excavations in that city have yet to reveal any amphitheatre in that city: AASS Jan. 2.218.13). Astësë's passio, parts of which find corroboration in an 8th or 9th-century monologion, does not include an amphitheatre anywhere in its narrative, in which the protagonist is smeared with honey and stung to death by flies outside the city gates and his followers are killed and buried “in the sand” (AASS Jul. 5. 6; see also Bryer 1994: 43. Bryer rightly suggests that “in the sand” probably does not refer to the sand of an arena). The chapel itself provides no evidence for a martyr cult. However, a photograph taken of the area prior to the removal of its floor reveals a narrow stone wall laid around the alcove and reaching to the lower border of the rear mosaic (thanks to A. Hoti for providing this photograph). The wall is too narrow for a bench and is best interpreted as the walls of a large, masonry tomb (the presence of such an over-floor grave would also explain why the lower border of both mosaics lay so far from the original pavement). The mosaics themselves include a series of small nails, sunk while the plaster was still wet and designed most likely to suspend a series of lamps (These nails were discovered by Dr. Roberto Nardi, who undertook a conservation assessment of the mosaics on behalf of the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property [ICCROM] in July of 2002. All descriptions are taken from his unpublished report, “Albania. Durrës. Inspection of the Mosaics in the Byzantine Chapel in the Amphitheatre,” submitted to ICCROM. We are most grateful to Dr. Nardi for his advice and friendly cooperation with our project). These lamps, along with the mosaics' petitioning inscription and donor figures suggest that the images served a votive, intercessory function, specifically appropriate to a funerary context. The chapel may thus have been built as a small funerary church, probably for one or more of the city's elite families.

Our recent excavations have revealed the amphitheatre of this time to be a dark, damp place, its galleries as much as one-third filled with the debris of two centuries (see below on the stratigraphic evidence for debris accumulation). Although still a looming monumental presence, the 10th- and 11th-century amphitheatre would have had a catacomb-like appearance, as its debris-filled galleries wound through a now semi-subterranean environment. Thus far, there is no evidence that the chapel space was in Christian use during late antiquity; assuming that the project was wholly a middle-Byzantine venture, it seems likely that its builders had to excavate the space, removing layers of debris and possible earlier graves before use (Even so, at the time the mosaics were laid the floor level was some half-metre above Roman levels. The chapel may have been entered both via the upper galleries of the amphitheatre itself, but also through the arena, whose own rising debris levels made access through the two flanking semitoria possible. Early excavation photographs show signs of later construction around the edges of the southern semitorium, possibly some type of monumental entrance associated with the Christian phase). The construction of the apse which jutted into the arena would likely have encountered the graves which had been accumulating there since the 7th century. Revealing the past through excavation, not simply conquering it through construction may thus have formed an important component of the project. By laying claim to ancient space through excavation, and by particularly choosing that space which had served as the literal seat of Roman imperium to commemorate family and self, the amphitheatre chapel proclaimed the status of its patrons. The rising political and religious prominence of the city in the 10th century, as both a local power centre and projection point for Byzantine authority, probably produced an increasingly prominent and competitive elites (Stephenson 2000: 67, 74–5, 121–125; Chevalier 1998). Such elites might have found the reclamation of the amphitheatre, and with it the city's past, a particularly potent vehicle for self-promotion during this time of change.

The Late-Byzantine Chapel

A second, smaller chapel on the amphitheatre's northeast side was discovered by Lida Miraj in the late 1980's, and was partially re-excavated by the author's team. Smaller and less grandiose than its cousin across the arena, it tells a similar story of loss and rediscovery.

The space selected for Christian use was a stairs landing, leading from the higher ground outside the amphitheatre's northeastern side down into the bowels of the building (Fig. 5). New excavations inside the chapel revealed that at the time the chapel was constructed, the amphitheatre's galleries were about half-full with debris. Thus, the chapel's builders had actually to excavate the space in question to build their chapel. Stratigraphic evidence indicates that they first removed several metres of debris from the space to create sufficient head-room, although they stopped about 70 cm above the Roman floor levels. They then blocked the stairs leading upward with a largely brick-built wall, complete with a small niche, seemingly the focus of cult in the space. Finally, a second masonry wall was erected across the second gallery, over the now debris-covered stairs, blocking it off. The resultant space was a rough T-shape, low-ceilinged, with a dirt floor. The builders then hewed back the brick and opus caementicum walls, particularly around the entrance and the semitorium, permitting more light to enter and giving the space a grotto-like feel.

A terminus post quem for the chapel's construction is given by early 13th-century ceramics found beneath the newly-constructed gallery wall (context 050/075: late 12th- or 13th-century amphora. A more detailed report appears in this volume). The date of abandonment is unknown, but seems to have occurred prior to the 16th century (context 022, which seems to lie over the collapsed remnants of the southern closing wall (028), contained three pieces of an Early Turkish
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Figure 5. Plan, Chapel 2 (Drawn by D. Andrews).

was built across one of the gallery's alcoves, and was pierced by a single, narrow opening. This wall was elaborated with a marble cross in relief, attesting to its Christian function. Earlier excavations found the space packed with disarticulated human skeletal material, and thus identified it as an ossuary. In addition to human bones, the space produced a whole array of other finds, including animal bones, knives, ceramics and some coins of the 10th century, the latter of which led the excavators to date the monument to that period (Billac 1987).

The recent re-excaavation of this space, however, produced a very different chronology. A sizeable collection of 16th-century Ottoman ceramics, mixed with Late Roman wares, was discovered below the ossuary's well-constructed tile floor (Ottoman ceramics were also found above the floor in areas seemingly bypassed by earlier excavations. Contexts 007, 005 and 010 contained fragments of Ottoman ibrik, probably 16th century: see Vroom in this volume for complete examples). While further excavation is required to confirm these dates, it would seem most likely that the ossuary was built or modified during the Ottoman period. Given the reports of 10th-century materials and the generally jumbled positioning of the skeletal material, this ossuary probably held re-deposited graves from a variety of periods. The most likely origin of these graves was the adjacent arena and gallery necropolis, which had been accumulating graves since the 7th century and which, as has been suggested above, would have been continually encountered by those undertaking Christian construction projects in the amphitheatre. It would appear, then, that some of these graves were excavated and then re-enshrined within this small ossuary.

What motivated 16th-century Christians to excavate these graves and then to re-enshrine the bones remains a mystery. Given the care they took to rebury the remains in a finely-constructed ossuary, it is possible that these later Christians regarded the graves as being those of earlier martyrs. The fact that Marinus Barletius, who visited the city at approximately this time, could still identify the site as an amphitheatre suggests that the ancient functions of the building had not been forgotten (Barletius 1596: 488). Indeed, the first widespread associations of amphitheatre spaces with martyr's deaths begin to appear about this time, as the Flavian amphitheatre in Rome received its first Christian chapels and popes like Eugenius IV and Pius V began to emphasize that monument's Christian history (Delehaye 1897: 212–213). The city's fall to the Ottoman Turks may likewise have prompted the city's Christians to examine anew their own past, as they, like the martyrs of legend, now found themselves a minority faith under non-Christian hegemony.

Conclusions

By standards of size, construction or chronology, there is little that distinguishes the amphitheatre at Durrës from its hundreds of fellows around the Mediterranean. The amphitheatre's real importance, however, lies in the deep levels of stratigraphy contained within its arena and gallery, earth that documents a thousand-year long history of loss and rediscovery. It is in these levels that one
can see medieval persons doing much as Arthur Evans did, seeking to rediscover their city's greatest monument and in doing so, reinterpreting it and reshaping it anew for each generation. Whether unearthing new spaces for Christian ritual, reclaiming the monument's associations with imperial power, or carefully venerating the bones of the long-dead, Medieval Durrësians were constantly losing and rediscovering their amphitheatre.

Today, Durrës' risks losing its amphitheatre in a wholly different and irreversible way, as the pressures to use the space for political rallies, tourism, even beauty pageants have placed irreplaceable earthen history at risk. Within the Durrës amphitheatre, in the areas that have yet to be touched by modern shovels lies the history of the city itself and even more importantly, the history of the city's reckoning with its own past. To tear through those layers haphazardly, for the purpose of a single night's spectacle, would be to silence centuries of Durrësians who struggled to keep hold of their monument and to make sense of their own history. Theirs is a story that only a carefully planned and meticulously executed excavation can tell; anything else would be poor tribute to their memory.

Monograms, symbols and epigraphs of the Early Byzantine period in Albania


The monograms may be divided, according to their forms, as follows:

(a) Composite simple monograms

(b) Composite monograms with symbols